

ANNE NEELY
WATER STORIES

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Conversations in Paint and Sound

July 2014 – January 2015



Bloom
oil on linen, 60" x 52", 2014

FOREWORD

Inspiring curiosity and an appreciation of science is central to the role of a science museum. At the Museum of Science, we focus not so much on the facts of science but on thinking itself — particularly inquiry. Art, when presented as the core experience rather than as adornment, draws visitors into contemplative inquiry and enables paths of learning unavailable otherwise.

Anne Neely's work intrigues me because it invites inquiry so powerfully. These paintings' deep sense of mood and their many details and ambiguities call on me — and I hope everyone — to explore them in detail and ponder the ideas they express. Each painting conveys important concepts. And together, they convey a fundamental truth beyond the sum of those ideas. Water is a unifying element that connects the things we need and value, the way nature truly works, and the myriad of impacts we humans have.

This exhibit not only invites inquiry, it models it. The paintings are a set of intellectual and emotional breadcrumbs left behind as Anne journeyed through the phenomenon of water. We can experience and interpret her creations, but we can also pursue our own paths of inquiry — among the paintings and within each one's visual complexities.

Perhaps this exhibit will have a deep effect on you, one that seeds inquiry into the roles water plays and humanity's many impacts. If that's the case, then we — artist and museum — have fulfilled our now-joined mission.

David G. Rabkin

Farinon Director for Current Science and Technology
Museum of Science, Boston



**WATER
STORIES**
Conversations in
Paint and Sound





Spill
oil on linen, 70" x 92", 2014

PAINTING WATER Lilly Wei

Water, once taken for granted, thought to be inexhaustible, now faces a far less certain future. It is another vital resource that has been endangered by insufficient oversight and a reckless disregard of consequences. While not an activist artist, Anne Neely is deeply attuned to nature and its cycles, long the inspiration for her artwork. Alerted to the compromised state of water, she felt compelled to address it, her "environmental conscience" profoundly jolted. Hydraulic fracking, contamination of rivers, lakes and other bodies of water, aquifer peaking, peak water in general, global warming, and the interconnected and devastating repercussions of accelerating industrialization have now been the focus of her practice for the past decade.

Neely includes two audio tracks as part of the installation for *Water Stories*, working in collaboration with sound artist Halsey Burgund. One is a comprehensive collage of the sounds of water: oceans, rivers, lakes, streams, falling rain, dripping faucets, the splashing of children at play in water, and more. It speaks of water's ubiquity in our lives and its significance. The other track consists of commentary excerpted from interviews with locals about water conditions throughout the country that she recorded for this project. However, not surprisingly, since Neely is first and foremost a painter, it is the fourteen paintings on view that form the heart of the exhibition. Oil on linen, all made within the past year and a half or so, they evocatively and sensuously engage with the subject of water, portrayed as chapters in a visual narrative that also emphasizes beauty, Neely's updated interpretation of a venerable art historical theme.

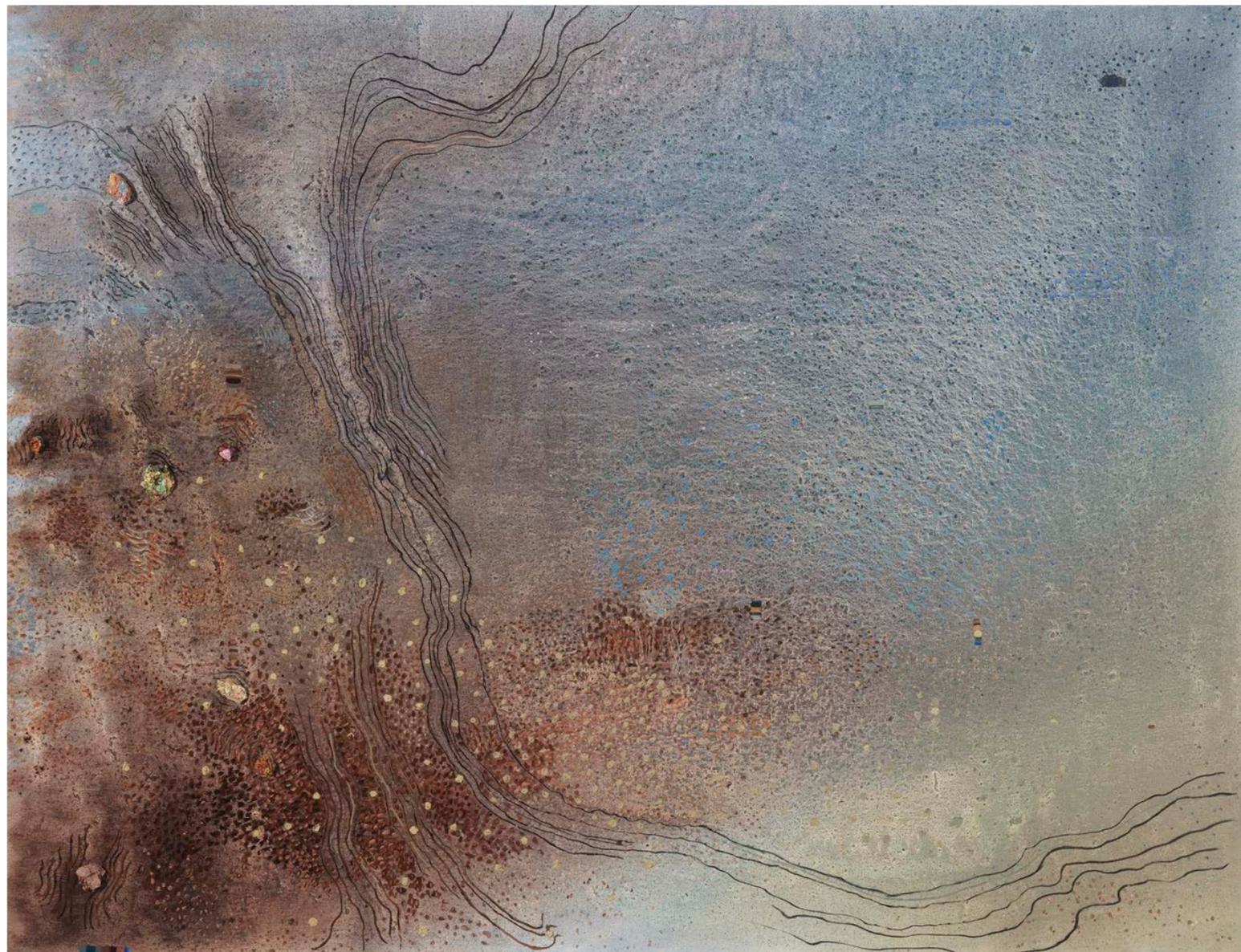
The paintings vary in size; one is formatted as a diptych, another paired. They begin as pours and drips of paint onto stretched linen, a gambit that allows Neely to initially suspend control of the process, to "have it laid out for me." She has already selected the basic color scheme and she choreographs the pour to a certain extent, but only a certain extent. The paint also has its say and pushes back; it's a dance of sorts and very physical. Once the pours have been made, Neely reasserts her prerogatives as the artist, going back into the painting to build it up, adding countless marks, layering with multiple coats of translucent and opaque paint, at times pouring again, adding more marks, further fine-tuning, enriching.

The earlier works in this series such as the darkly tremulous *Troubled Waters* and earth-toned *Peak* are more easily read as landscapes and seascapes. *Troubled Waters* is an aerial view of a river at night, immersed in a nocturnal blackness that masks the pollution of air and water while *Peak* shows an expanse of parched ground met by a wedge of gorgeous blue water, necklaced with debris. *Beneath*, on the other hand, is not as legible a scene. Pivoting between the representational (a cross-section of the land with a wellbore penetrating deep into it to extract oil and gas) and the abstract (a composition of golden ochre bands, topped by more somber earth tones and crossed by a wavering ribbon of violet, the surface spangled with little circles, squares, and rectangles that glitter like glass tesserae), it revels in its painterly existence. Neely's distinctive pictorial vocabulary also includes rosettes of paint that add crunch to the surface and short bursts of diagonals that look like rain but are emblematic of the gleam of light on water.

Many of the later paintings — *Bloom*, *Spill*, and *Offshore*, for example — are characterized by a palette of lush blues and greens. *Offshore* has a streak of coruscating green that is particularly exhilarating, so coloristically high-pitched that it is almost audible. *Lost*, on the other hand, is gossamer, delicate, its modulated blues and roses subtly verging on the colorless, its rippled lines finely tracing a river's meandering banks, specifically referring to the Colorado River, the overconsumption of its waters and its lost exit to the sea. Like all the works in this grouping, *Lost* can be read as a panoramic view, extreme close-up or somewhere in-between, its points of view constantly shifting, its scale fluctuating, energizing the surface.

The last painting Neely made for the show is *Blue*. It might be considered non-objective in another context, a rectangle of cascading, wavering blue, so diaphanous in some areas that it seems still wet, its pristine surface disrupted only by little nubbins of pigment that snag the gaze. At the same time, it is also her most absolute portrait of water, reminding us, as she does throughout this exhibition, that water is precious, requiring vigilant stewardship, its despoiling unthinkable since there is no replacement for it.

Lilly Wei is a New York-based art critic and independent curator.



Lost (River)
oil on linen, 56" x 72", 2014

WATER Sandra Postel

Water is always on the move — falling, flowing, swirling, infiltrating, evaporating — and all the while knitting the vast web of life together. Thanks to the solar-powered hydrologic cycle, water is the great connector across space and time. My morning coffee might contain water molecules the dinosaurs drank.

We talk of water in the most utilitarian of ways, as a “right” and as a “resource,” when in fact it is so much more: it is the planet’s greatest gift and the source of life itself.

Viewed from space, Earth is an incredibly blue planet. But only 2.5 percent of all the water on Earth is fresh. And two-thirds of that freshwater is locked up in glaciers and ice caps. Less than 1 percent of Earth’s water is both fresh and accessible to us. And that supply is finite, even as our population and consumer demands keep growing.”

Everything we use, wear, buy and eat takes water to make — sometimes surprisingly large amounts. A simple cotton shirt can require 700 gallons, with most of them consumed by the cotton crops growing in the field. We don’t think much about water when we fuel up our cars, but each gallon of gasoline takes some 13 gallons of water to produce.

And so today, in our world of nearly 7.2 billion people and \$78 trillion in yearly goods and services, we face an existential conundrum: we are running out of water when and where we need it. Rivers like the Colorado, Indus, Nile and Rio Grande, to name a few, are drying up. We are depleting the aquifers beneath our feet, in effect using tomorrow’s water to meet today’s demands. And as the planet warms, dry areas are getting drier, and wet areas are getting wetter. The future will not look like the past.

Against this backdrop, Anne Neely’s stunning images take me to my emotional core. She conjures the mystery and magic of water, but also confronts us with its seemingly discordant duality: floods and droughts, harmony and conflict, life and death. Each of us is about two-thirds water. Anne’s water stories are our stories.

The decision to exhibit Neely’s beautiful and engaging works of art in a museum of science is a stroke of brilliance. If we are to create a future in which we live in harmony with Earth’s life-giving water cycle, we must apply the best of our human ingenuity — and science — to shape our technologies and our personal actions. To bring the inspiration and depth of feeling of Anne Neely’s art together with the intellect of our inquiring minds promises to bear fruit of a new and needed kind.

Sandra Postel is a Freshwater Fellow, National Geographic Society.



WATER STORIES Anne Neely

My parents fostered in me and my siblings an abiding love for nature, its tangible manifestations of sky, sea, and land as well as its intimations of the unseen, the infinite, and its invitation to imagine.

I found painting to be the most compelling way to continue my connection to nature and delve more deeply into the unseen. It has been through the practice and process of painting that I reference those early childhood memories viscerally, triggering them with what I observe, read, and know in my contemporary world. Because it is very important for me to “wonder” as I paint, I approach painting by asking questions, just as a scientist does, and it is through my investigation of these questions that a painting is built. With one curiosity layered on top of another, my paintings begin to come to life. I start by pouring paint on a canvas to make a base and further define a structure. As I paint I find that each piece gives me a thread to follow for the next painting, and gradually a body of work emerges.

My own visual language of mark-making has developed over the years, so that each painted stroke helps me find new configurations of the natural world through space, color and form. These marks consist of circles, squares, and rectangles and the sum total of these gestures explores uncharted territories of imagined landscapes. In their labor-intensive accumulation, the marks help define the passage of time both in the work and in the course of making it.

In 2004, reading *Water*, by Marq De Villiers, I initiated a decade-long search to find ways to paint unseen aquifers and to interpret the growing dilemmas around rivers, streams, lakes, and oceans. Water is mysterious, powerful, and staggeringly beautiful;

but unfortunately water is in such peril that it will deeply affect our future. To cherish water, like anything in life, is to pay homage, gratitude, and honor the things we love. So my paintings evoke beauty, but also linger on the edge of foreboding as they address these water issues environmentally, ecologically, and culturally in our times.

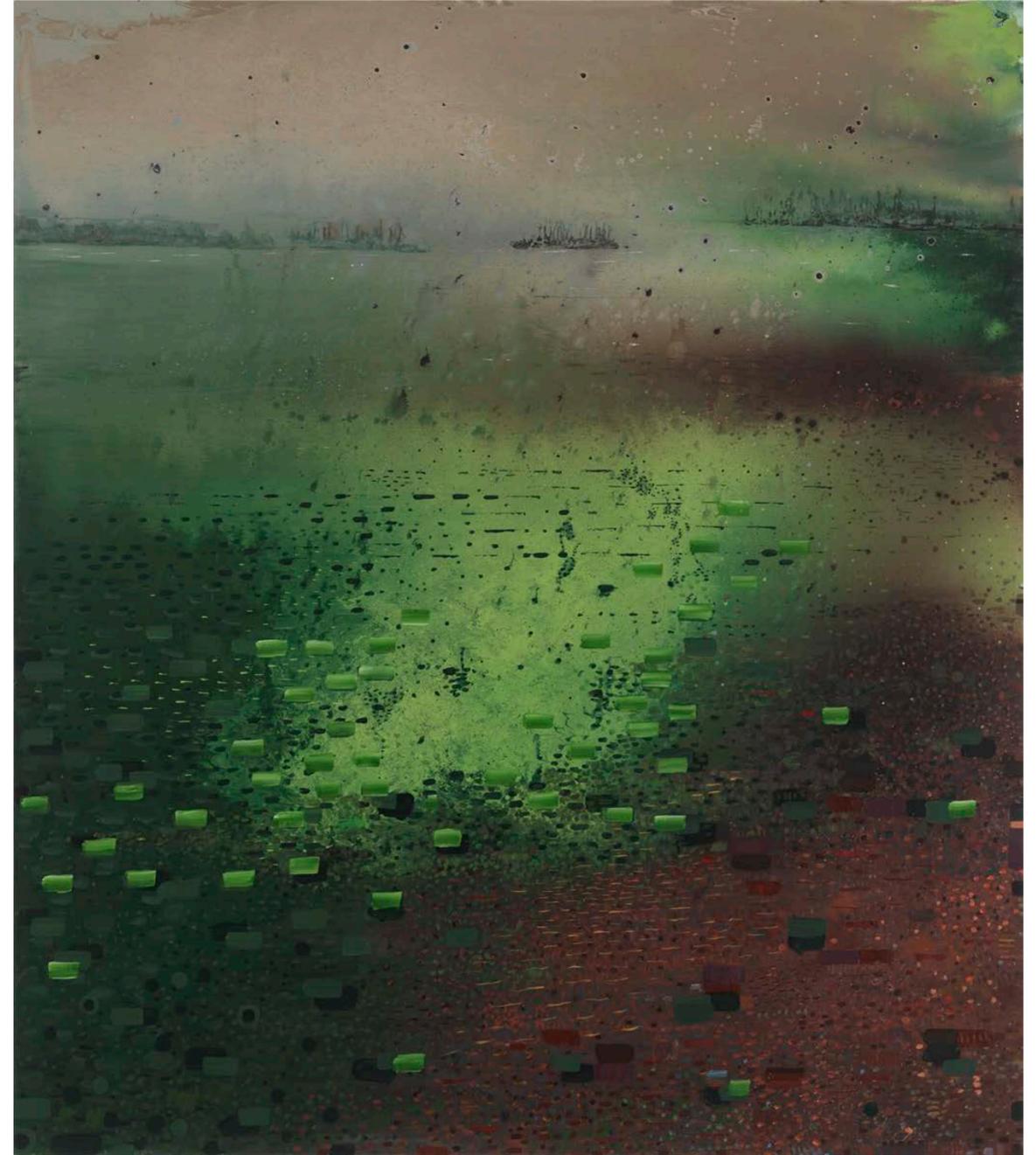
The *Water Stories* exhibition has four themes that directed these paintings. The first is Mismanagement & Overuse, pertaining to the Colorado River and the Ogallala Aquifer. The second is Contamination and Pollution, using the recent coal spill into the Dan River and the algae bloom in Western Lake Erie. The third theme, Climate Change, focuses on Hurricane Sandy and the Alaskan Glacier melt. Lastly, Water Mining explores the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania and water tapping in Maine’s spring waters.

Sound is as powerful as sight. It captures a particular moment in time and place, therefore I include voices from over 200 interviews in this exhibition because I want the viewer to experience simultaneously seeing and hearing. The interviews are divided into five sections: Water Stories, Cherishing Water, the Future of Water, Water Science, Bad Things Happening. Sound artist Halsey Burgund makes a tonal collage of voices with each of these sections. In doing so, he creates an immediate reference to the familiar and to the universal narrative we have in memory, in what we wish for, in what we fear, and in what is happening.

Through these paintings and voices, I hope these themes will speak to us and alter our thinking about water.

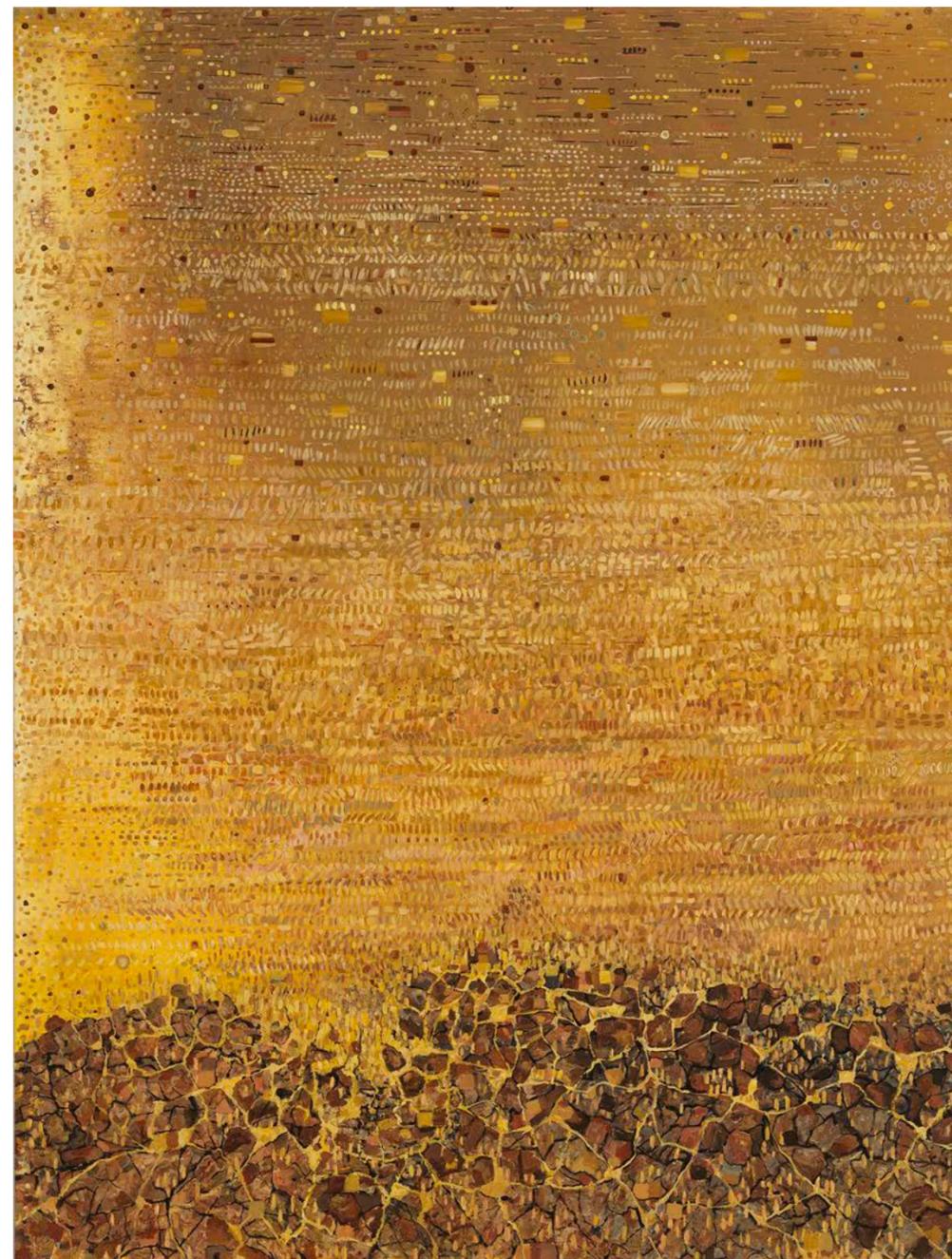
THE PAINTINGS

Bloom
oil on linen, 60" x 52", 2014



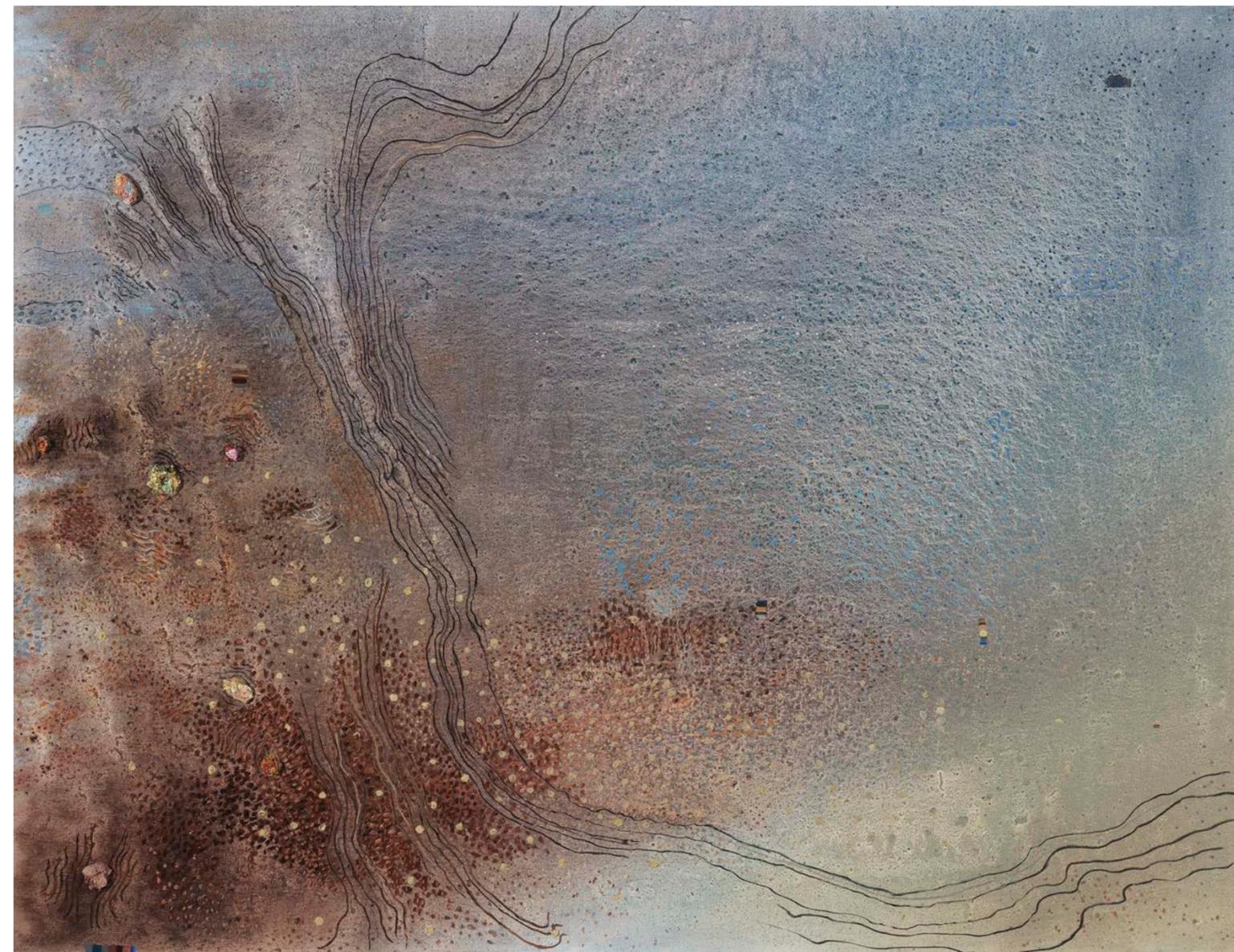
Run Off
oil on linen, 60" x 80", 2014





Within, Without, Trickle, Drought
Left: Trickle
Right: Drought
each painting oil on linen, 60" x 80", 2014
(installed dimensions 80 x 120")

Lost (River)
oil on linen, 56" x 72", 2014





Peak
oil on linen, 60" x 80", 2014

PREVIOUS SPREAD
Left: **Lost (River)** (detail)
Right: **Peak** (detail)



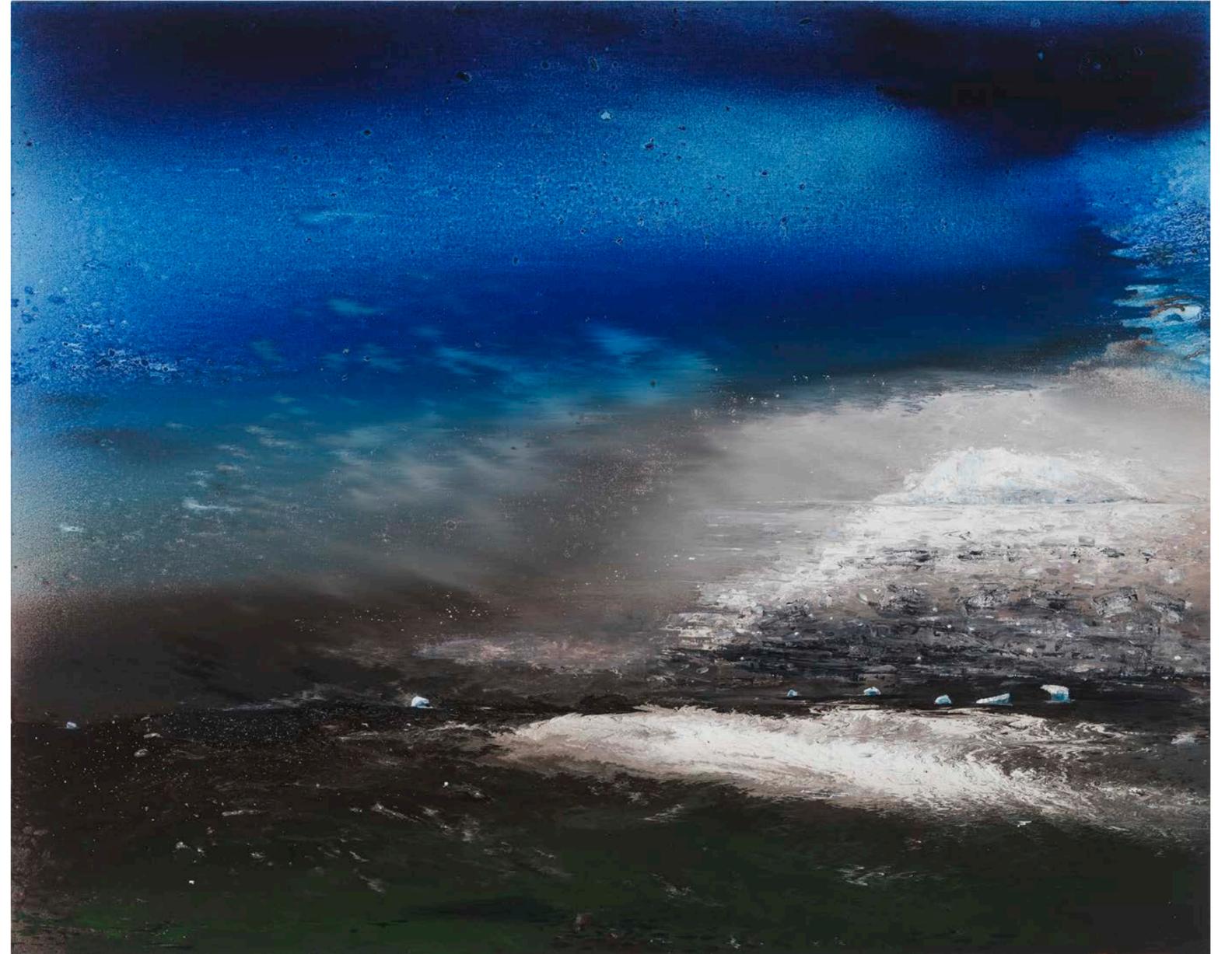
Troubled Waters
oil on linen, 52" x 60", 2014



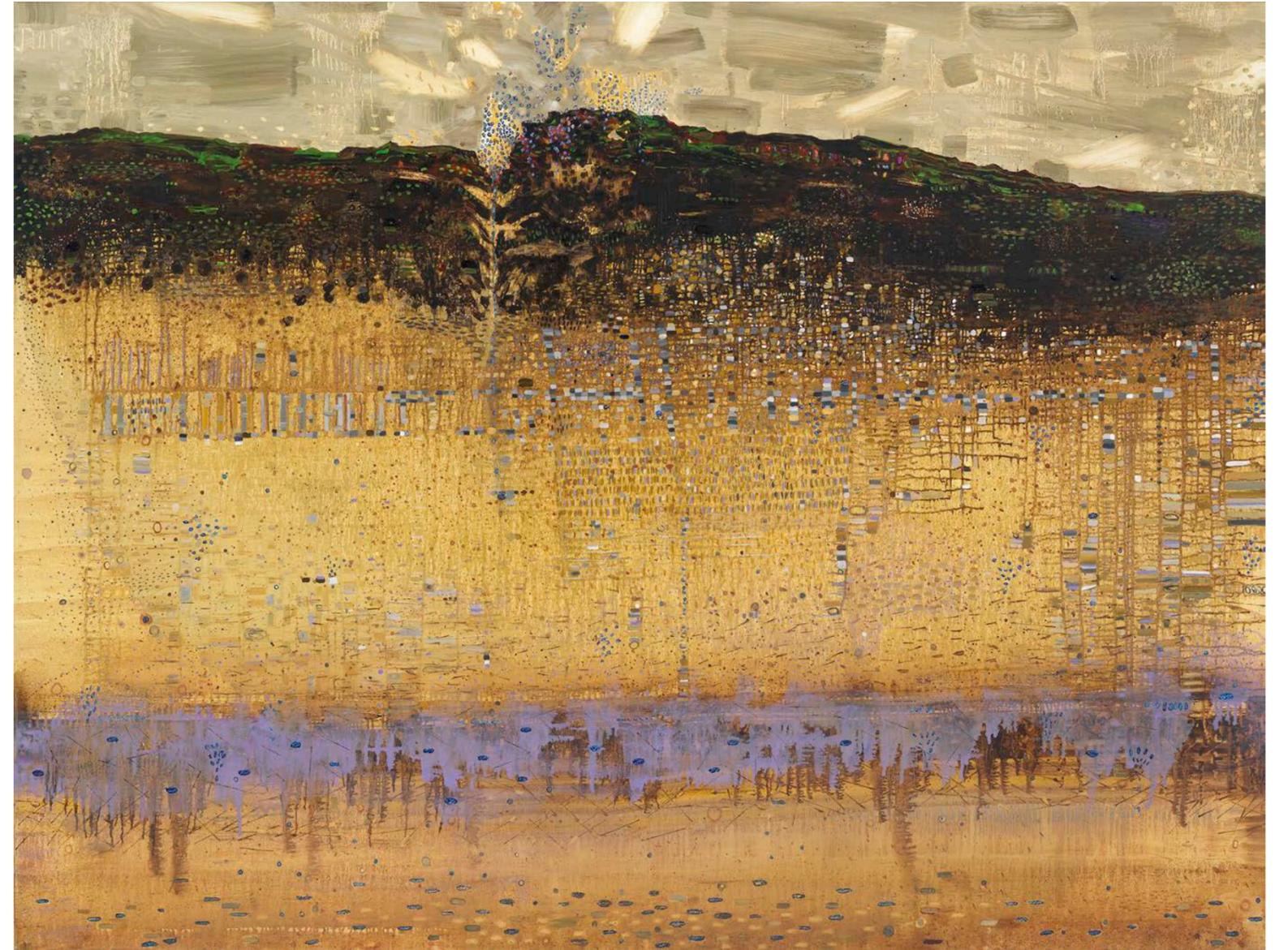
Splash
oil on linen, 60" x 80", 2014



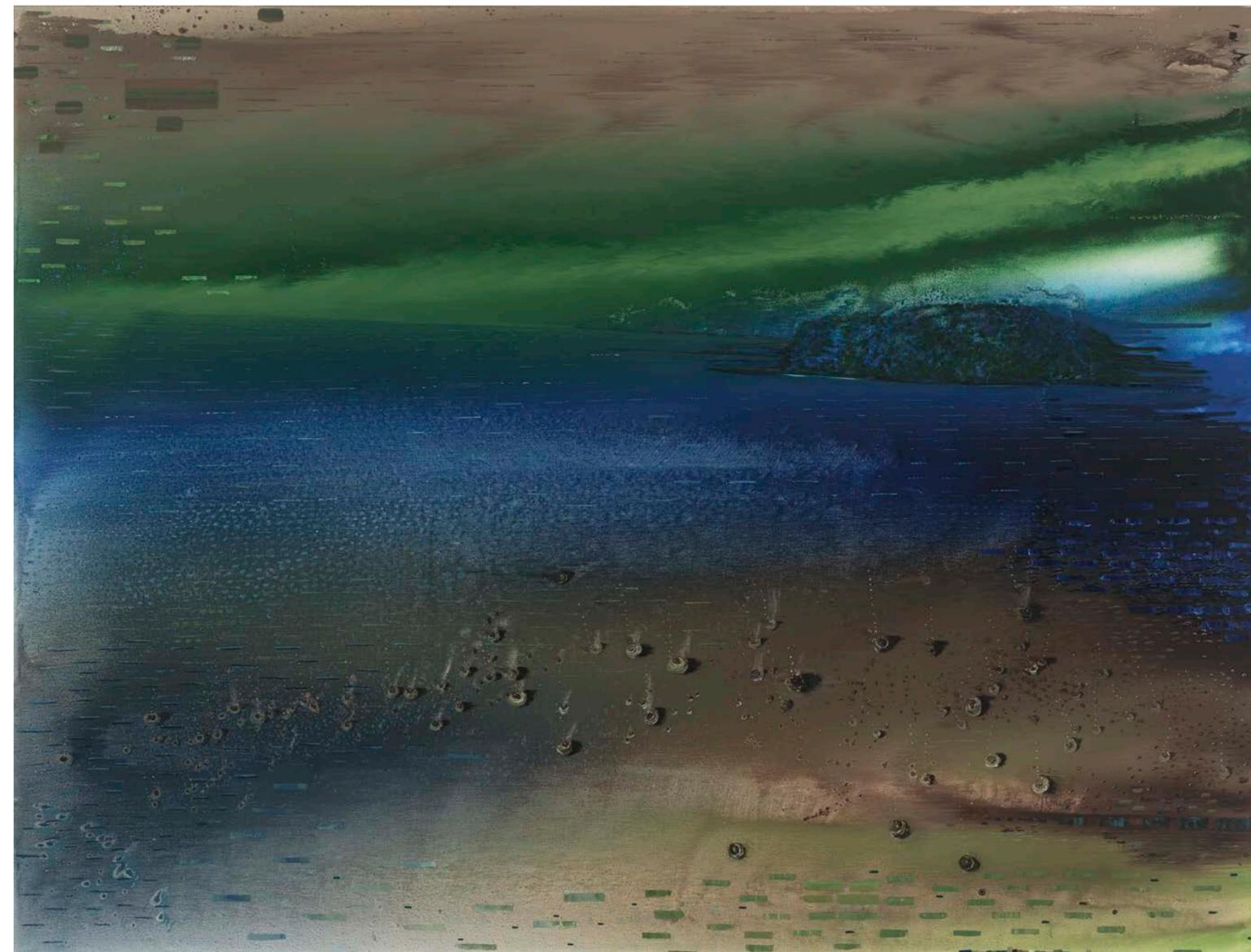
Calving
oil on linen, 48" x 60", 2014

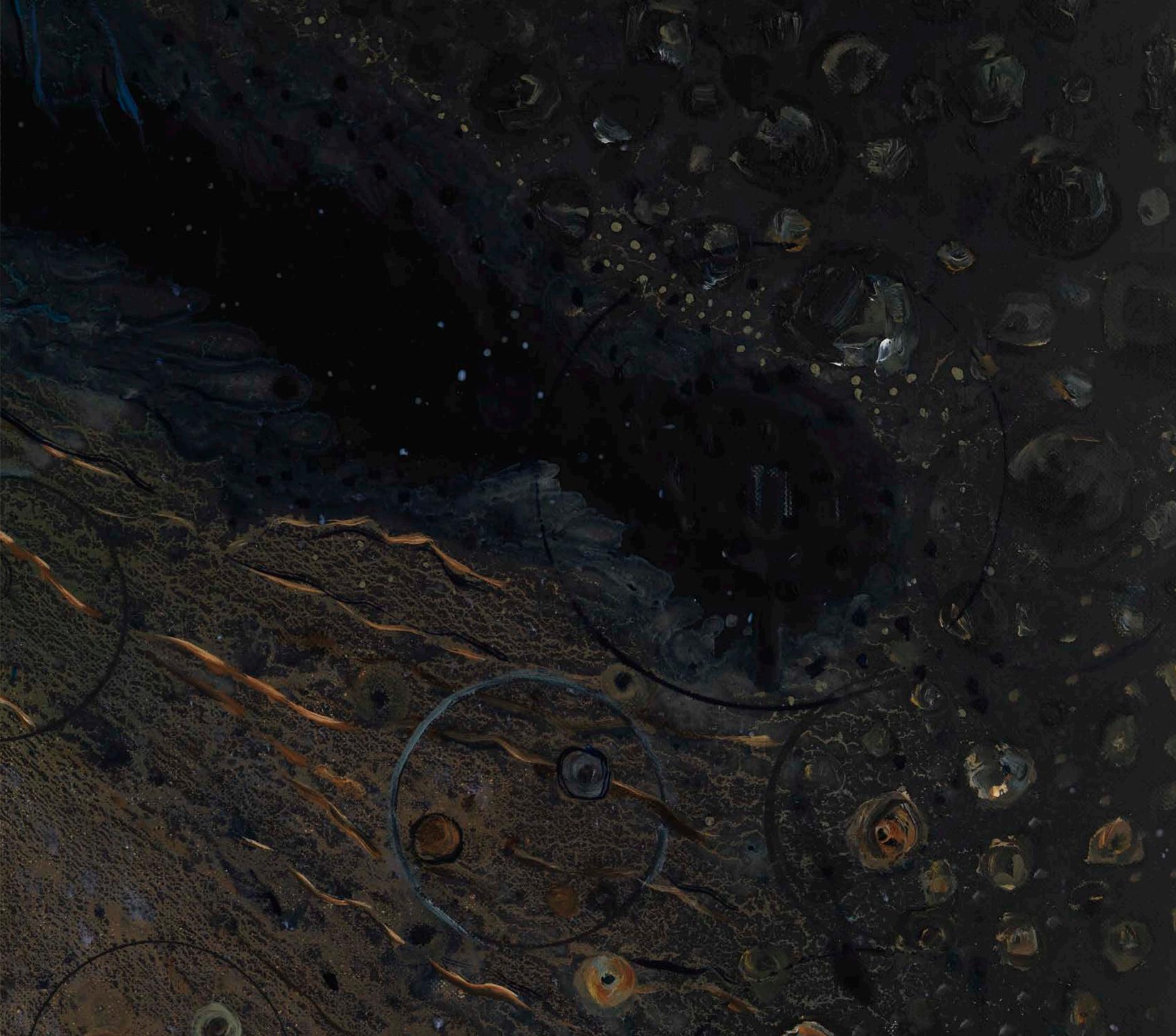


Beneath
oil on linen, 60" x 80", 2014



Offshore
oil on linen, 70" x 92", 2014





Gush
oil on linen, 48" x 60", 2014

PREVIOUS SPREAD
Left: **Offshore** (detail)
Right: **Gush** (detail)



Squall
oil on linen, 60" x 80", 2014





Alchemy Soup
oil on linen, 70" x 92", 2014

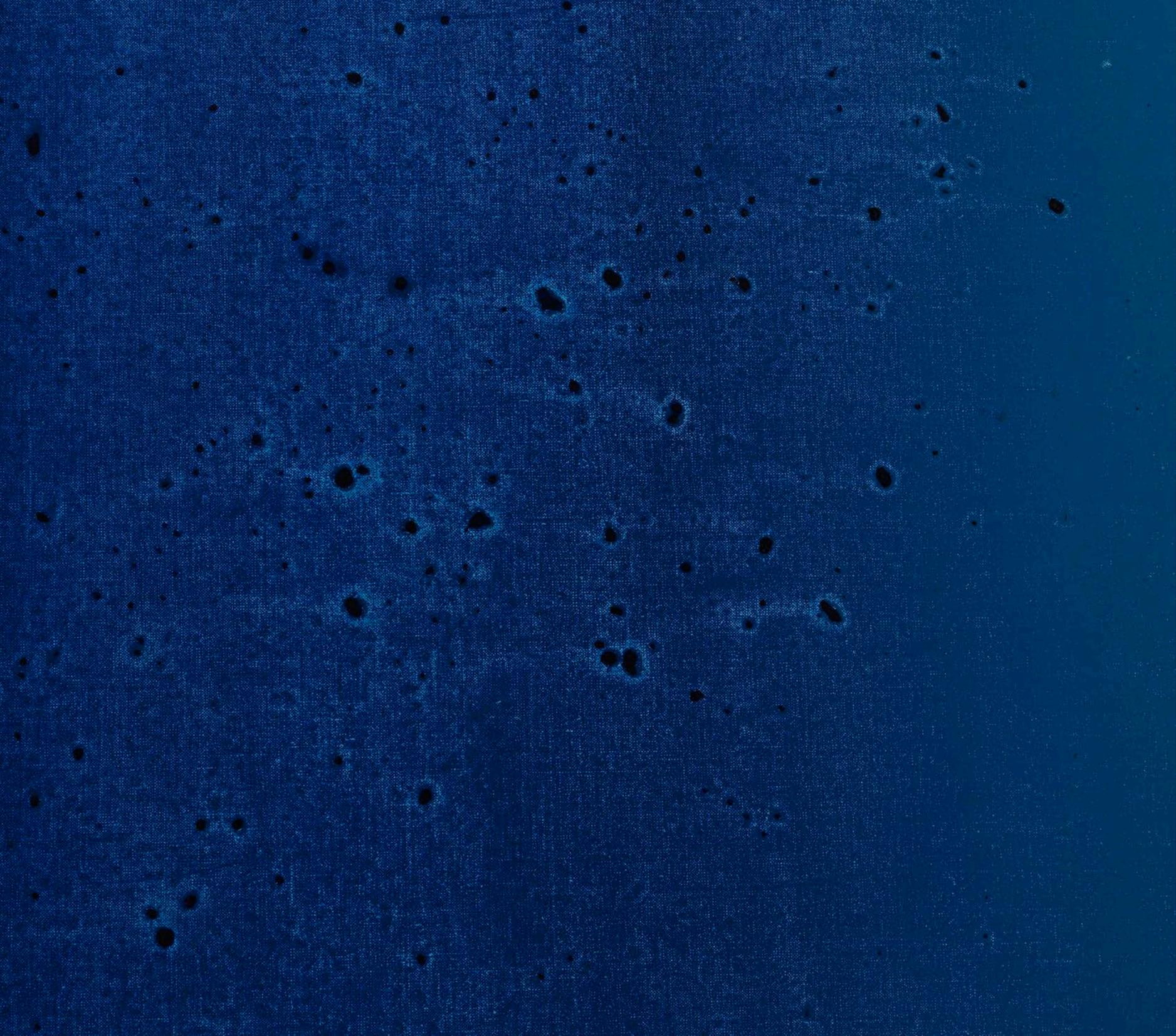


Spill
oil on linen, 70" x 92", 2014

Blue
oil on linen, 84" x 60", 2014

FOLLOWING SPREAD
Left: **Blue** (detail)





WATER: A LOVE STORY

Oh gentle lake, proud river,
Brave pond, and fragile stream,
Always in your Sunday best
Of shifting patterns seen
Atop your robes of green and grey.
Those lozenges expand and sway
Smoothed like taffeta or silk,
And closer to the shore,
A shimmering gold,
A luminous brown,
All dashed with deepest blue,
A syncopated gown.

Your ebb and flow floats rhythmically
Next to your stable edge.
But in that very moment,
I wonder if you wish
To be defined like this,
By boundary or shape?

Yet in the early morning
Where you meet my feet,
Your waters, shallow and so clear,
Your veins, a course of circles webbed,
I watch your gems of light,
Blips of blue-lipped diamonds bright,
Moving, sparkling, dancing,
Day and night,
Proving life.

Anne Neely
2014

CONTAMINATION & POLLUTION

In February 2014, nearly 82,000 tons of toxic coal ash and 27 million gallons of contaminated water leaked from a closed coal-fired power plant into the **Dan River**, which runs through North Carolina and Virginia. Arsenic and other heavy metals spilled into the river for a week before the power plant owner plugged the pipe.

When state officials tested the river, they found levels of copper, aluminum, iron, arsenic, lead, beryllium, boron, zinc, nitrates, and manganese that exceeded EPA risk levels. Ash sediment with similar contamination was found on the bottom of the river for 70 miles, as deep as five feet in places. This is considered the third worst coal ash spill to occur in this country.

Lake Erie turns bright green every summer. The culprit: algae. Phosphorus-heavy fertilizer used in agricultural operations runs off fields into streams, rivers, and then the lake. With ample phosphorus, their favorite food, the algae multiply.

The 2011 bloom set records: algae stretched for 120 miles. Concentrations of microcystin, a liver toxin produced by the algae, reached 1,200 times the limit, contaminating drinking water for 2.8 million consumers. Fish populations were affected, and the \$10 billion tourism industry was crippled. In 2011, the dead zone (lacking enough oxygen to sustain life) expanded to a third of the entire lake bottom.

Agricultural and industrial runoffs are leading sources of toxins for rivers, streams, estuaries, and lakes. An estimated 35% of US rivers and streams and 60% of lakes are too dangerous for fishing or drinking.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Glaciers cover over 28,590 square miles of the US. Most are in Alaska, with nearly 100,000 glaciers.

Alaska and Washington State receive a substantial percentage of their water supplies from glacial melt occurring every summer. In Washington, 470 billion gallons of water are provided; in Alaska, over 50 trillion gallons are produced.

US Geological Survey research conducted for the past fifty years indicates that almost all Alaskan glaciers are melting, and that, in the last five to seven years, thinning rates have doubled. Melt from Alaska's glaciers will contribute significantly to sea level rise.

Hurricane Sandy slammed into the US East Coast in October 2012. With cyclone-force winds extending 175 miles from the eye of the storm, Sandy was the largest Atlantic hurricane on record.

"Superstorm Sandy" affected 24 states — from Florida to Maine and as far west as Michigan and Wisconsin. Nearly eight million businesses and households were without electricity in 15 states and the District of Columbia, and 9,000 people in 13 states slept in shelters. All air flights and travel by trains, buses, and subways ceased operating. Federal offices were closed; Broadway performances were canceled; and the New York Stock Exchange remained closed for an unprecedented two days.

Damage in this country totaled \$65 billion. Sandy was the second-costliest hurricane in US history, surpassed only by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Climate change is intensifying glacial melt and weather events. The biggest contributor to climate change is our consumption of fossil fuels.

WATER MINING

Maine is rife with pure spring water. While surface water (rivers and lakes) is considered state property and withdrawal regulations are strict, groundwater is considered the well owner's property and withdrawal is unlimited.

Food giant Nestlé purchased local water companies throughout Maine and used their wells to mine groundwater for bottling and selling across the nation. When residents of Fryeburg noticed lower water level, green slime, and murkier water in Lovewell Pond, questions arose. Whose water is it? Will large withdrawals of water deplete the aquifer underneath? Should corporations profit from public water supplies?

Half of all bottled water is tap water, which costs under a penny per gallon. Bottled, this same water sells for about \$1.22 per gallon.

The Marcellus Shale, underlying Pennsylvania, New York and West Virginia, has natural gas trapped in its cracks. A technique called hydraulic fracturing (fracking) breaks apart the rock and frees the gas for extraction.

Mining for natural resources, like oil and gas, requires water. Each frack involves injecting three to five million gallons of water, sand, and chemicals; each well can be fracked 18 times. Twenty percent of the water resurfaces contaminated and is disposed of by injection into deep wells underground. This changes pressures around faults and can induce earthquakes.

Cleaner than coal or oil, natural gas can help cut greenhouse gas emissions. But fracking's environmental risks — aquifer depletion and contamination — may imperil our future.

Production of plastic water bottles utilizes 17 million barrels of oil a year.

MISMANAGEMENT & OVERUSE

The Colorado River runs through Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and California. Its large flow and gradient made it ideal for generating hydroelectric power. In 1931, the US Bureau of Reclamation built a series of dams, starting with Hoover Dam, to divert water and manage drought, agriculture, and electricity in the arid Southwest.

The river supplies water to over 30 million people, irrigates close to four million acres of land, and supports approximately 15% of crops grown in this country. Once mighty enough to carve out the Grand Canyon, the Colorado is so heavily tapped that it is now only a trickle at its delta. Scientists also recognize that the dams have altered wildlife habitat and threatened four species of fish. Today, the Colorado is one of the nation's most endangered rivers.

The Ogallala Aquifer lies beneath the Great Plains and is one of the world's largest aquifers. It provides water for one-fifth of the wheat, corn, cattle and cotton in the United States and nearly all the freshwater for South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas.

Worsening drought has caused farmers to rely increasingly on the aquifer for irrigation. Water is being drawn from the Ogallala more rapidly than rainfall and snowmelt can replenish it.

If withdrawal continues unabated, the Ogallala could be depleted in a few decades. Formed 10 million years ago, it would take hundreds or thousands of years to fully recharge.

The Colorado River and the Ogallala Aquifer are two examples of a growing phenomenon of overuse worldwide.



BIO

Anne Neely is a painter who spends her time between Boston, MA and Jonesport, ME. She has won several awards for painting, most notably she was a finalist for the Prix de Rome and recently was twice a finalist for the Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Fellowship. She has also been honored with residencies abroad and in 2012 was at Cill Rialaig Fellowship in Co. Kerry, Ireland. Her work has been shown in galleries and museums across the United States and can be found in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley, MA; The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA; the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, ME; Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. Until 2012 she taught Painting and Studio Art at Milton Academy where she held the Lamont Chair in the Humanities and served twice as the Director of the Nesto Gallery. Anne Neely is represented by Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, New York, NY and the Hammond Gallery, Co. Cork, Ireland.

Beneath (detail)

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Left: **Troubled Waters** (detail)



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Sound artist Halsey Burgund's audioscapes can be accessed at www.anneneely.com.

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